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Master of Business Administration

Maastricht University

Advisory report of the assessment of the existing programme
28 January 2025

Colophon

Institution and programme

Maastricht University

Maastricht

Institutional Audit: yes

Programme: Master of Business Administration

Level and orientation: wo-master

Size: 70 EC

Site: Maastricht & locations of partner institutions

Mode: full-time, part-time and online

ISAT-number: 75013

Specialisations:

- Standard MBA (no specialisation)
- Specialisation Healthcare Management
- Specialisation International Business Innovation Management

Assessment panel

Eric Dooms, chair

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Summary

On 28 January 2025 an assessment panel of AeQui visited Maastricht University (UM) to perform a quality assessment of two degree programmes offered by the School of Business and Economics (SBE), Maastricht School of Management (MSM). This external assessment is part of a broader cluster evaluation of wo-bedrijfskunde programmes in the Netherlands. The underlying document reports on the panel assessment of the Master of Business Administration (MBA) according to the NVAO framework for limited programme assessment. The panel's overall judgement is [positive](#).

Intended learning outcomes

Since its founding in 1952, MSM is dedicated to global management education and international development with a focus on emerging economies. Between 2018 and 2022, MSM and UM explored and eventually completed a merger, integrating MSM into UM's School of Business and Economics (SBE). The MBA programme at MSM amounts to 70 EC and is available in 10 variants, combining full-time and part-time modes, as well as face-to-face and online formats. Each variant is built around three pillars: a diverse student body, faculty with international experience, and a curriculum with a global perspective. While most students are looking for a broader perspective of business, the expert tracks and specialisations offer opportunities to deepen their interests in specific areas. The MBA programme has a distinctive profile that is in line with the history, scope and ambitions of MSM and attracts for each variant a specific audience of student-professionals. The strength of the programme lies in its flexibility, its customisability and its broad perspective preparing students for leadership roles and responsible management practices in diverse international settings. Notwithstanding the previous panel's request for a more specific rewrite, the MBA programme is still adopting the broadly formulated 'old' learning outcomes. The current panel has looked at the envisaged 'new' learning outcomes for 2025-2026 and finds these to be comprehensive and formulated in line with the

domain (business administration), level (master) and orientation (MBA) of the programme. It also establishes that there is a clear link between the new learning outcomes and the respective learning goals at course level. Furthermore, the MSM Advisory Board is an important instrument to advise on the relevance of programme objectives and learning outcomes. The panel concludes that the programme **meets** this standard.

Teaching-learning environment

The MBA programme has a strong teaching and learning environment featuring a coherent curriculum, a befitting didactic concept, a diverse student audience and well-qualified teaching staff. The panel endorses the decision to offer the programme in English, and approves of its English-language title. The panel thinks highly of the alignment between the different components of the programme, which all seem to fit like bits of a jigsaw puzzle that fall into place. Qualified and enthusiastic staff, state-of-the art facilities, extensive and highly appreciated student services, befitting admission requirements, high success rates, specific teaching approaches, a well-thought out curriculum structure, and extensive quality assurance provisions to safeguard the quality of the courses across variants and locations: all elements coincide within the bigger picture / profile of the MBA programme. Moreover, the combination of curriculum components allows students to reach the end qualifications as stipulated in both the

old/current and the new/envisaged learning outcomes. The panel concludes that the programme **meets** this standard.

Student assessment

The MBA programme can rely on a robust system of assessment. Both course and thesis assessments are embedded in well-established policies and frameworks at the level of the school(s) and the university, while the curriculum map and the assessment files safeguard that course learning goals are assessed adequately and cover the programme learning outcomes. Course assessment is carefully designed, varied, and well aligned with the learning objectives. In addition, the transparent information on assessment ensures that students are adequately and fairly assessed throughout their study. The panel thinks highly of the quality assurance system for assessment, which is comprehensive and effective, and commends the Executive Education Chamber of the Board of Examiners and the SBE Assessment Committee for their expertise and commitment. The thesis review has demonstrated that the evaluation form is relevant but elaborate and thus cumbersome for assessors to complete in an insightful way, hence the panel's support for its envisaged adjustment. The panel concludes that the programme **meets** this standard.

Achieved learning outcomes

Students who graduate from the MBA programme have acquired all intended learning outcomes. The selected and reviewed MBA theses take the form of an academic research paper, a business consultancy project or a business plan and meet the quality expectations for a final MBA project. The panel commends MSM for building and maintaining an alumni network,

which students are making good use of and are eager to join after their studies. MSM goes at lengths to monitor the professional whereabouts of its alumni. These data show convincingly that the MBA programme has a transformational power, preparing students for a more challenging, rewarding and fulfilling position on the labour market upon graduation. The panel concludes that the programme **meets** this standard.

Recommendations

With an eye on the future, the panel offers the following points for development:

- perform a final check on the exact formulation of the new intended learning outcomes of the MBA programme before they are rolled out in September 2025;
- monitor in the thesis preparation phase whether student competencies are aligned with the chosen thesis type, topic and research approach;
- reflect on the added value of the current types of MBA thesis, and explore more specific alternative formats for the business consultancy and the business plan options;
- organise workshops for thesis supervisors enabling them to provide tailored research / methodological support to their respective students;
- review the thesis evaluation form, finding a balance between the (number of) assessment criteria and feedback opportunities;
- monitor the consistency in thesis evaluation between (critical) feedback and (generous) scoring;
- act in a swifter way than before on the recommendations that will come out of the underlying accreditation report.

All standards of the NVAO framework have been positively assessed. On this basis, the panel provides a [positive recommendation](#) regarding the accreditation of the Master of Business Administration.

On behalf of the entire site visit panel,
Utrecht, April 2025

Eric Dooms
Chair

Mark Delmartino
Secretary

Introduction

Institution

Maastricht University (UM) was established in 1976. It currently features six faculties, 22000 students and 5000 staff. UM is known for its innovative education model, international character and transdisciplinary approach to research and education.

The School of Business and Economics (SBE) has a broad scope with areas of expertise in economics, international business, management, public policy, governance and sustainability. Its education approach is challenge-driven, innovative, collaborative and inclusive.

Since its founding in 1952, MSM is dedicated to global management education and international development with a focus on emerging economies. In 2018, MSM and UM started exploring a merger in order to combine MSM's expertise in global management education with UM's academic and research capabilities. In September 2022, the merger was formally completed with a full integration of MSM into SBE. The inclusion of MSM's executive education portfolio, including the two degree programmes under review, increased not only the portfolio of SBE, but also the collaboration between faculty and students of both institutions. SBE now has two complementary institutes offering executive education: the globally oriented MSM, and UMIO focusing on the Dutch and western European market.

The director of MSM reports to the Dean of SBE. MSM degree programmes are managed by Academic Programme Coordinators who report to the Director of Academics, who in turn reports to the MSM Management Team. Programme quality assurance is supported and coordinated by SBE's Policy Development and Quality

Assurance (PDQA) cluster and is part of the Assurance of Learning cycle.

MSM has built an extensive partner network around the globe. These institutions have a long experience in providing management education and give international students the opportunity to attend classes partially in Maastricht and partially at the partner locations. Teaching and assessment in the degree programmes take place under the responsibility and control of SBE/MSM. Partner institutions assist in student recruitment and provide local facilities and student/educational support.

Programme

The Master of Business Administration (MBA) programme at MSM is available in different variants, combining full-time and part-time modes, as well as face-to-face and online formats. An overview of these variants is provided in Attachment 5. At the core of the MBA programme are three pillars: a diverse student body, faculty with international experience, and a curriculum with a global perspective. Across all variants, the MBA programme places a strong emphasis on understanding and managing within a global, multicultural context, and aims to prepare students for leadership roles in diverse international settings. This implies a focus on practical problem-solving and decision-making, taking an evidence-based approach. The programme goes beyond imparting knowledge and tools for effective management and fosters a deeper understanding of responsible management practices. In this regard, MSM upholds rigorous ethical standards in business and advocates for corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainable development. While most students are looking for a broader rather than specialised perspective of business, the expert tracks and

specialisations offer opportunities to deepen their interests in specific areas.

MSM has a long history in offering an MBA programme. In 2019, the previous accreditation panel looked at three variants: the full-time MBA, the Executive MBA and the Online MBA. In recent years, the number of variants has increased and were incorporated in the MBA portfolio of MSM in consultation with NVAO and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCQ). Further to the integration of MSM in SBE and UM, the Executive MBA Maastricht and the Online MBA are about to close (the last intake was in 2022) and have been replaced by similar variants starting in 2024. At the time of the site visit in January 2025, the MBA programme amounted to 70 EC and consisted of 10 variants.

Assessment

The external assessment of this programme is part of a wider wo-Bedrijfskunde cluster visit involving 20 degree programmes at eight higher education institutions in the Netherlands. Maastricht University has commissioned AeQui to carry out the assessment of the two degree programmes offered by MSM in this cluster.

In the run-up to the visit, a preparatory meeting was held with representatives of SBE/MSM to exchange information and plan the dates and programme of the site visit. In collaboration with the programmes, AeQui assembled an independent and knowledgeable panel (see Attachment 1). The panel explicitly oriented itself to the cluster in which the programme is placed. The visit was carried out on 28 January 2025 according to the programme presented in Attachment 2.

The assessment was conducted based on the Accreditation Framework for Higher Education

in the Netherlands. UM has a positive institutional audit decision, and therefore the panel assessed four standards of the framework. During the previous accreditation round, the then panel made recommendations for further development. The actions taken in response by the programme are listed in Attachment 3. The panel has integrated this follow-up into its considerations for the current assessment.

The host produced and collected a lot of materials on the programme, including a self-evaluation report, and made this available to the panel in an online 'base room'. An overview of the materials is listed in Attachment 4. In the run-up to the site visit, the panel studied the programme's self-evaluation report and reviewed a sample of 15 theses. Their first impressions on the report and the thesis (evaluations) formed the basis for discussion during an online preparatory meeting on 24 January 2025, and guided its questions during the visit.

An Open Consultation Hour for students, teaching and support staff was organised in connection with the preparatory meeting; eventually, nobody signed up to speak individually and confidentially with the panel. At the initiative of MSM/SBE, a Development Dialogue took place at the end of the site visit. The results of this meeting did not affect the assessment presented in this report.

The panel conducted the assessment independently. At the end of the visit, the chair informed the programme and institutional representatives about the panel findings, considerations and conclusions. A draft version of the underlying report was sent to the programme, whose response was incorporated into this final version of the report.

Intended learning outcomes

Standard 1: The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.

Findings

Profile

The Master of Business Administration (MBA) programme at MSM consists of 70 EC and is offered in different variants. At the core of the MBA programme are three pillars: a diverse student body, faculty with international experience, and a curriculum with a global perspective. Across all variants, the MBA programme places a strong emphasis on understanding and managing within a global, multicultural context, and aims to prepare students for leadership roles in diverse international settings. This implies a focus on practical problem-solving and decision-making, taking an evidence-based approach. The programme goes beyond imparting knowledge and tools for effective management and fosters a deeper understanding of responsible management practices. In this regard, MSM upholds rigorous ethical standards in business and advocates for corporate social responsibility (CSR) and sustainable development. While most students are looking for a broader rather than specialised perspective of business, the expert tracks and specialisations offer opportunities to deepen their interests in specific areas.

Each MBA variant targets a specific audience of student-professionals: the Full-Time MBA caters to high-potential professionals with a minimum of three years of work experience who aspire to forge a career in international management; the Part-Time (Global) Executive MBA variants accommodate professionals with at least five years of experience who seek to integrate their work responsibilities with MBA studies; and the

Part-Time (Global Flex) Online MBA variants cater to senior professionals who prioritize the flexibility of online learning. The panel was informed that, in comparison to the other Master in Management programme under review, the MBA variants are tailored for individuals with professional experience seeking more advanced leadership roles, and focus more on strategic, ethical and practical aspects of business management.

In addition to its flexibility through the many variants, the MBA programme stands out for its customisability as students can follow one of nine expertise tracks during the Summer School in Maastricht, as well as specialisations (healthcare management and international business innovation management) that go deeper into specific areas of interest and expertise. Finally, six MBA variants are either offered partly at locations of partner institutions (Bucharest, Kuwait, Nanjing) and/or as a Dual Degree with Corvinus University in Budapest and the University of Indonesia, which are both reputed and AACSB-accredited institutions.

The panel gathered from the written materials that the profile of the MBA programme is tailored to the specific ambitions of different student audiences. During the visit, students, staff and management provided useful clarifications on the MBA profile(s) and how the programme and its variants complement the existing programme portfolio of MSM and SBE. Moreover, the sessions on site were useful for the panel to understand how the MBA programme at MSM differs from the other MM programme under review. The school and programme manage-

ment agreed with the panel that this difference is less obvious looking at the profile and learning outcomes of both programmes yet emphasised that the difference is clearly visible in the (learning goals of the) respective courses and curriculum components. Moreover, the panel was informed that MSM is currently finalising an internal MSM/SBE exercise with regard to the programme learning outcomes and course learning goals that – as of September 2025 - will make the differences between the MM and MBA profiles much more explicit.

Intended learning outcomes

Across its variants, the MBA programme upholds one set of intended learning outcomes (ILOs). These ILOs are aligned with the Dublin Descriptors, which define the expected learning achievements for master degrees in the European Higher Education Area. Based on these generic descriptors, overall programme learning outcomes have been developed, as well as specific learning goals for each course in the MBA programme.

The panel gathered from the written materials that the five programme learning outcomes – one per Dublin Descriptor – apply equally to all variants and locations. Whether students follow the programme in Maastricht, at a partner institution, online, or in a Dual or specialisation variant, they work towards the same outcomes and are assessed by the same standards. Preparing for the site visit, the panel noticed that the learning outcomes are formulated at a generic level, are applicable to multiple programmes and are not specifically connected to the intentions and ambitions of the MBA programme. While this approach provides flexibility, the lack of specificity makes it difficult to clearly reflect the unique content and skills that the MBA programme aims to develop. This, in turn, can lead to a less recognizable profile for graduates and

weaker alignment with labour market needs. During the visit, the programme management acknowledged this impression and emphasised that both the distinction between the programmes and the specific profile of the MBA programme are accounted for – and very visible – in the (learning goals of the) respective curriculum components/courses.

Furthermore, the panel noticed that the previous accreditation panel had come to similar findings requesting the programme to reformulate the MBA learning outcomes in a more precise way. The panel was informed that following the integration of MSM into UM/SBE, the MBA programme learning goals were being aligned with those of SBE, among others through the Assurance of Learning process by an audit panel. The audit panel results contributed to the alignment process, which at the time of the site visit was about to be finalised. During the visit, the programme management indicated that the new MBA learning outcomes are in an advanced stage of completion and should take effect as of September 2025. The new set of 16 intended learning outcomes will align with the matrix of four SBE and four MSM goals.

The envisaged learning outcomes were not part of the programme materials. Given its own observations on the current learning outcomes, the recommendation of the previous panel, and the near-completed status of the new learning goals, the panel requested – and obtained shortly after the site visit – a final draft version of the new learning outcomes, as well as their connection to the learning goals of the respective course components. The panel noticed that the new set of learning outcomes is comprehensive and clearly connects with the learning goals per course. It endorses the programme approach to have a limited set of learning goals per course, and to connect each of these goals

to a particular programme learning outcome. Looking at for instance the learning goals for the research methods course and the thesis in the MBA programme, the panel noticed that these learning goals are specific and indicate precisely what is expected of MBA students in terms of knowledge, skills, attitude, and product delivery. Notwithstanding its positive appreciation, the panel suggested to perform a final check on the exact formulation of the intended learning outcomes before they are rolled out in the academic year 2025-2026. It did so because some formulations seemed either a bit artificial or overly ambitious, and because the attention to research in course learning goals was not yet that visible in the programme learning outcomes.

Professional Field

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that the professional field plays an important role in the design and delivery of the MBA programme. Companies and professional field representatives are involved as guest lecturers or as hosts for company visits. Moreover, the MBA students bring their own work experiences to the classroom, creating a link between academia and the business world, and focus in their thesis on a business problem that is usually close to their own professional environment.

Furthermore, MSM has an Advisory Board featuring external professionals with diverse backgrounds. This board advises the MBA programme on strategic developments, labour market trends, and curriculum innovation. Its role includes commenting on the relevance and clarity of the intended learning outcomes.

MSM also maintains close contact with its alumni, many of whom have entered management roles in various sectors around the world.

Alumni are occasionally involved in guest lectures, in mentoring, or as contacts for company projects. Their feedback contributes to the programme's alignment with the field.

The panel acknowledges the comprehensive way in which the professional field is involved in the MBA programme. In this regard, the efforts of MSM to keep track – and make good use – of its alumni are impressive. Students indicated during the visit that they appreciate the opportunities the programme offers to build/enhance their professional network of companies, individuals and alumni. Moreover, the panel welcomes the work of the MSM Advisory Board in monitoring and advising on the programme objectives and learning outcomes.

Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that the MBA programme has a distinctive profile that is in line with the history, scope and ambitions of MSM and effectively attracts for each variant a specific audience of student-professionals. Following the discussions on site, the panel thought the programme was attractive for its core rationale across variants – a broad perspective on understanding and managing within a global, multicultural context, preparing students for leadership roles and responsible management practices in diverse international settings – as well as for its flexibility and its customisability.

At the time of the site visit, the MBA programme was still adopting the broadly formulated 'old' learning outcomes that were already applicable at the time of the previous accreditation, notwithstanding the then panel's request for a more specific rewrite. The current panel looked at the envisaged 'new' learning outcomes for 2025-2026 and found these to be comprehensive and formulated in line with the domain

(business administration), orientation (MBA) and level (master) of the programme. Moreover, the panel established that there is a clear link between the new learning outcomes and the respective learning goals at course level.

The panel welcomes the comprehensive way in which individuals, companies and alumni are involved in the design, delivery and monitoring of the MBA programme. It commends MSM for building and maintaining an alumni network, which students are making good use of and are eager to join after their studies. Moreover, the MSM Advisory Board is an important instrument to advise in a systematic way on the relevance of programme objectives and learning outcomes.

In addition to these positive considerations, the programme team may want to perform a final

check on the exact formulation of the new intended learning outcomes of the MBA programme before they are rolled out in September 2025. Furthermore, while acknowledging the institutional changes and endorsing the quality of the (envisaged) outcome, the panel does wonder why it took such a long time to address the recommendation of the previous panel regarding the learning outcomes. It therefore invites the programme team to decide/take action in a swifter way on the recommendations that will come out of the underlying accreditation report.

Taking these considerations into account, the panel assesses that the programme **meets** this standard.

Teaching-learning environment

Standard 2: The curriculum, the teaching-learning environment and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

Findings

Programme

The Master of Business Administration amounts to 70 EC in all its variants. The composition of the curriculum differs between the MBA with specialisations and the other variants. In the latter case the curriculum consists of 14 core courses (42 EC), a master thesis (16 EC) and a choice between nine expertise tracks of four courses each (12 EC). The MBA variants specialising in healthcare management or international business innovation management feature 11 core courses (33 EC), eight specialisation courses (21 EC), and the master thesis (16 EC). The panel was informed that setting the MBA programme at a total of 70 EC was a conscious decision to comply with the requirements of the Association of MBA programmes (AMBA), a highly reputed international accreditation body whose recognition is an important quality indicator. Students indicated to the panel the MBA at MSM came on their radar because of its accreditation by AMBA.

The panel appreciates the curriculum set-up of the programme, which provides students with a comprehensive foundation in business principles while offering flexibility for specialisation and personalisation. The core courses cover fundamental areas and key business concepts to prepare students to tackle real-world challenges in their future careers. The teaching staff offering these courses indicated to the panel that the small size of each core course requires them to make conscious decisions as to what is fundamental for this particular audience of student-professionals to know.

The expertise tracks and specialisations allow students to turn the MBA programme in an individual study path that befits their career expectations and personal interests. The panel noticed – and welcomes – the efforts of the programme team to accommodate the recommendation of the previous accreditation panel and integrate more specialisation options in the curriculum. The panel learned during the visit that the internal structure of the nine specialisation tracks will change as of September 2025: instead of four courses of 3 EC each, the tracks will consist of two courses of 6 EC to facilitate a better integration of the topics. The panel approves of this adjustment. The panel also noticed that the two MBA variants with specialisations combine the broad foundation of a regular MBA programme with considerable specialist attention to a particular management domain. In the case of the healthcare specialisation, the panel acknowledged with satisfaction that the programme called upon experts from the medical faculty of UM to deliver part of the specialisation courses. Furthermore, the panel gathered from the written materials that the standard curriculum also applies to the MBA Dual Degree programmes, where students receive waivers for a number of MSM courses as these are offered by the partner institution. In all cases, however, the specialist tracks were offered by MSM and the master thesis is co-supervised and evaluated by both institutions. With regard to the latter, the panel established in its thesis review (standards 3 and 4) that the (assessment) quality of the master thesis produced in the dual degree variants was of the same quality as the capstone products in other variants.

The third component, the master thesis, takes the form of an individual research project that serves as the capstone of the programme. MBA students can choose to pursue an academic research paper, a business consultancy project or a business plan. The choice between three thesis types gives students the option to explore real business problems that can help them develop their careers. While the focus of the three thesis types differs, their respective validity is ensured by the requirement that all thesis types identify and process academic literature, use or develop a conceptual framework, collect quantitative and/or qualitative data, and provide an analysis and recommendations. Each student is assigned a supervisor, who guides them through the process, provides feedback on the proposal and drafts, and ensures that the work meets academic standards. In addition to the core course on research methods, students can take specific non-credited workshops to refresh the specific methodological skills they need for their thesis research. While the thesis is academic in nature, many students choose topics that are inspired by current developments in the business world or by their personal career interests. The panel found that overall, the rationale for the master thesis component befitted an MBA programme.

The panel was informed that irrespective of the MBA variant, each core course is designed, delivered and assessed in the same way. In order to ensure quality across the different courses and variants, MSM appointed an Academic Course Coordinator as responsible for the design, delivery, assessment and improvement of each course. These coordinators consult with teaching staff implementing the course in the different variants and on the different locations, monitor assessment outcomes, and hold final responsibility for grade validation. The panel appreciates that MSM has taken extensive measures to safeguard the quality of the

courses in the different variants and at different locations.

Overlooking the curriculum, the panel found that the courses and their learning goals are connected to the learning outcomes at programme level. In this way the MBA curriculum across all variants allows students to achieve the end qualifications. Further to its findings under standard 1, the panel welcomes the programme's approach to formulating a limited set of learning goals per course, and to connect each learning goal to a particular programme learning outcome.

The discussions on site have strengthened the panel's initial impression from the materials that the curriculum is fitting for this type of programme and is in line with the profile of the MBA programme. It offers the intellectual lever for individuals with professional experience to move up in their career and become business managers and leaders in organisations with a global, transitional or emerging outlook. MBA students the panel spoke to confirmed that this is exactly what was announced, what they came for, and what is happening in the day-to-day reality of the programme.

Language of instruction

Right from the start of the programme, the Master in Business Administration was taught in English and had an English title. The panel was informed that this decision reflected – and still reflects – the international scope of the programme, the diverse composition of the student body, and the professional orientation towards global management roles. English is the common language among students and staff, and it is the primary language of communication in all programme materials, assessments and classroom interaction.

The choice for English was/is also aligned with UM's internationalisation strategy and with the profile of MSM, which has a longstanding focus on development, emerging markets and international cooperation. The choice for an English-language programme enables to attract students from outside the Netherlands and to prepare graduates for careers in international environments.

The panel was informed that MSM requires all teaching staff to have a sufficient command of English to teach effectively in this language. All staff are fluent in English, and several are native speakers. New teaching staff are expected to demonstrate English proficiency at CEFR level C1. If needed, staff is supported to further develop their language skills. This policy ensures that the quality of instruction is maintained across the board. Students indicated to the panel that they thought the level of English instruction was good, and that they appreciate the highly international (and intercultural) dimension of the programme, as well as the multinational and multicultural composition of the student cohorts.

The panel noticed that the decision to offer the MBA programme in English was very effective: over the years, the programme has been attracting an increasingly diverse student audience, most of whom are non-Dutch. This diversity in turn has allowed the programme to make good use of the International Classroom, thereby enriching the learning experience of all (Dutch and non-Dutch) students and enhancing the overall academic quality and relevance of the programme.

The written materials and the discussions on site have convinced the panel that the decision to use English as a language of instruction in the MBA programme is motivated properly at the

levels of the university, the school(s) and the programme. Moreover, the international and intercultural dimensions are embedded in its profile and vision, and substantiated in the day-to-day delivery of the MBA contents, the didactic principles, and the composition of the student cohorts. According to the panel, the MBA programme is truly international – and intercultural – in several respects, not just in terms of language.

In addition, the panel was informed that in order to respond to the specific needs of the Chinese market, the part of the Global Executive MBA variant that takes place on location in China is offered in both English and Chinese. According to the programme team, bilingual instruction facilitates better networking among students, faculty, and industry professionals from both Chinese-speaking and English-speaking backgrounds, enhancing the ability of students to build professional networks across linguistic and cultural boundaries. In this specific variant, all assignments submitted for assessment are translated into English. The programme management indicated that this arrangement had been discussed with NVAO prior to launching the specific variant. Given the strict quality assurance mechanisms set by UM and SBE for teaching and assessing the MBA programme (see further), the panel endorses the rationale of MSM for offering this particular programme variant in a bilingual way.

Learning environment

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that the programme objectives are reflected in the educational environment. Hence, the different curriculum components include various teaching formats, interactive pedagogy and structured reflection on personal development.

The problem-based learning system, which is typical of UM, emphasises active learning, and particularly the contextual, constructive, collaborative and self-directed nature of learning. The panel noticed that MSM follows this learning approach in different ways:

- *Contextual learning* is visible in different 'alternative' teaching methods, such as case studies, simulations and company projects;
- *Constructive learning* encourages the students to construct their own knowledge through written assignments, guest speakers, company visits and the thesis.
- *Collaborative learning* is embedded in group work activities throughout all courses where students develop essential soft skills.
- *Self-directed learning* is promoted through group work, written assignments, and the master thesis.

The panel was informed that courses are mostly delivered in compact long-weekend modules. This modular structure enables students to focus intensively on specific topics and allows for a clear sequencing of content. The course set-up ensures that students receive timely feedback and that progress is monitored throughout the year. Moreover, the programme structure is such that it provides a balanced progression from knowledge acquisition to application and independent research. The integration of academic and practical elements is facilitated by the sequencing of modules and the scaffolding of learning outcomes across the curriculum.

Further to the recommendations of the previous accreditation panel, MSM has developed an online learning environment – the Flex Platform - to be used for both face-to-face and online courses. This platform provides a complete learning environment for all modalities and ensures uniform access to course materials and resources irrespective of the mode of delivery and

regardless of geographical location. The different features of the platform offer students a richer learning environment and a more personalised learning approach through self-study exercises, interactive assessments, video materials, and supplementary resources, next to the essential reading. The panel was informed that the MBA programme is run completely from the Flex Platform as of September 2024.

The variety in cultural, national and disciplinary backgrounds of the MBA student cohorts allows the programme to make optimum use of the International Classroom. This didactic principle aligns very much with the scope of the MBA programme as diverse student cohorts learn to be open to different (management) perspectives, reflect on international issues and cooperate and communicate in respect to international contexts, which is crucial for working in the global business environment.

Furthermore, the panel noticed that MSM places great emphasis on ensuring an optimal student-faculty contact. Small classes with groups of around 30 students are the basis for a student-centred approach. Face-to-face teaching includes 24 teaching hours and two consultation hours per 3 EC course. This provides students with the opportunity to receive additional guidance and support where needed.

Students indicated to the panel that they appreciate the overall educational approach of the programme: the curriculum structure with short intensive blocks allows to focus on one particular domain at a time, while the variety in teaching approaches keeps all students focused on the programme and does justice to the different learning styles of the individual participants. Moreover, students value the international and intercultural dimension of the programme and the associated educational principle of the

international classroom. According to the panel, the didactical approach adopted by MBA befits both the profile of the programme and the type of student audience.

The panel read in the materials and heard from the students on site that the MBA programme offers excellent guidance to students. The programme supports students throughout the entire academic year. Each student is assigned an academic mentor whose main function is to make students familiar with the Dutch way of living and doing business. In addition, students receive guidance from the thesis coordinator, academic course coordinators and the academic programme coordinator. At the start of the year, the MBA programme provides onboarding support through a comprehensive introduction week, during which students are introduced to the academic expectations, digital tools, support services, and each other. Early contact with teaching staff, thesis coordinators and student advisors is part of this onboarding process. Students also have access to the facilities of MSM and, through the integration with UM, to a broad range of university services. The central services include student wellbeing and inclusion, psychological counselling, disability services and support for students facing academic or personal difficulties. Teaching takes place in a wing of the SBE building on the Tapijnkazerne campus in Maastricht, which is within walking distance of other university buildings, SBE Tongersestraat location, and student housing. Students have access to the research databases of the university as well as to digital literature, which is valued and used in particular during the thesis phase. During the visit, students and alumni emphasised that the MBA programme team was really looking after them. The many international students and alumni thereby indicated that the programme

made great efforts to make them feel welcome and included, a mission they succeed(ed) in.

Student admission, intake and success rate

The MBA is open to students from a broad range of academic backgrounds: applicants can hold any completed bachelor (or master) degree from a recognised university, regardless of discipline, and should demonstrate a good command of English. Students in the full-time variant have at least three years of professional experience, while applicants for the part-time variants should demonstrate at least five years of experience. The curriculum is crafted to ensure success across topics without previous knowledge of (specific domains of) management. Applicants though must complete four online levelling courses in Accounting, Business Finance, Microeconomics, and Quantitative Research Methods, as well as a Write & Cite module on academic conventions and referencing skills before the start of the programme, unless they have a GMAT score of 600 or higher. These entry conditions help ensure that students are ready to engage with the curriculum. Further to the discussions on site, the panel found the admission requirements to be appropriate for, and in alignment with, the profile of the MBA programme.

On average an MBA student cohort consists of 30 students per entry moment. According to the detailed overview of student enrolment and completion rates, the full-time variant reaches this target, while the global executive and specialisation variants on location, as well as the Dual Degree with Hungary exceed the expectations. The variants that are about to close and the most recent online and dual degree variants have less enrolments. The panel was informed that every cohort and variant have a different composition; the online variants and those offered at MSM invariably are very international

with students from many different countries and continents. The diversity in backgrounds enriches classroom discussions and supports peer learning.

The panel noticed in the table with completion rates that the success rate differs somewhat per variant. Almost all MBA students who enrol on the fulltime variant effectively complete the programme: since the previous accreditation visit in 2019, only 10 (out of about 175) students dropped out. The success rates are also very positive: between 65% and 89% of students graduated in the nominal duration of 12 months. Although student cohorts are too small in the online variant to establish percentages, a qualified majority of students tend to finish the programme in time. The panel noticed similarly positive nominal success rates of more than 50% in almost all other variants and cohorts. The number of dropouts in these variants tends to be limited in almost all cases.

Staff

The MBA is taught by a core group of academic staff affiliated with MSM and UM, supplemented by guest lecturers and professionals from the field. The panel gathered from the extensive staff involvement list (79 entries) that all teaching staff hold at least a master degree, and most have a PhD. Moreover, staff members have academic expertise in their subject areas and relevant experience in international education. MSM teaching staff are involved in both teaching and research. Research activities are embedded in the Global Development and Emerging Markets research theme of SBE. This ensures that the content of the programme is informed by current academic developments and that staff remain connected to broader disciplinary debates. Several faculty members also have professional backgrounds or participate in consulting work in areas such as strategy, innovation

and development cooperation. This contributes to the applied orientation of the programme and enables staff to bring practice to the classroom.

The small scale of the MBA programme variants allows for frequent and informal interaction between students and staff. Supervision of group work and the thesis process is intensive, and staff are generally accessible outside class hours. Students the panel spoke to during the visit repeated what is indicated also in teaching evaluations, that they appreciate both the approachability and the expertise of faculty. The panel established based on the CV's provided in the staff list that the faculty involved in the MBA programme have adequate research credentials, disciplinary know-how, and didactic skills. Moreover, the discussions on site revealed that these teaching staff are enthusiastic and committed to the programme and the MBA students.

Furthermore, the panel learned that MSM operates with a distinctive staffing model that enriches the educational experience of its students. While MSM maintains its own payroll for academic staff, it also collaborates with faculty from SBE and engages external professionals for teaching roles. Notwithstanding its own approach, MSM teaching staff are expected to hold the University Teaching Qualification (UTQ) or pursue it upon appointment. Since the integration of MSM, staff development is supported through professionalisation activities offered by the SBE Learning Academy and the university-wide EDLAB, including workshops on assessment design, academic integrity, and the use of AI in education. External lecturers are required to meet institutional quality standards before taking on teaching or supervision duties. Thesis supervisors complete mandatory training sessions on supervision practices and thesis

assessment before being assigned as assessors. The combined system of role-based responsibility, standardised tools, and targeted training contributes to a structured and professional quality culture in MSM and the MBA programme. The panel appreciates both the quality expectations towards MSM teaching staff and supervisors, and the opportunities offered to these staff for continuous professional development. The latter point was also a recommendation of the previous accreditation report. In line with this recommendation, the current panel endorses the efforts of the MSM management to continue increasing the quality of the MSM teaching staff.

Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that the MBA programme has a strong teaching-learning environment featuring a coherent curriculum, a befitting didactic concept, a diverse student audience and well-qualified teaching staff. The panel moreover endorses the decision to offer the programme in English – and in one variant in a bilingual English-Chinese scheme - and approves of its English-language title. According to the panel, the MBA programme is truly international in several respects, not just in terms of language.

The panel considers that the curriculum in general and each variant in particular aligns with the profile of the MBA programme at MSM, offering the intellectual lever for individuals with professional experience to move up in their career and become business managers and leaders in their organisations. It established furthermore that the curriculum allows students to reach the end qualifications as stipulated in both the old/current and the new/envisaged learning outcomes. The panel thinks highly of the quality assurance provisions taken by MSM to safeguard the

quality of the courses in the different variants and at different locations.

The panel appreciates the didactic concept that underlies the programme: problem-based learning, the international classroom and the contextual, constructive, collaborative and self-directed nature of learning are no theoretical constructs on paper but are effectively implemented in the day-to-day reality of the MBA programme. The panel welcomes the new Flex Platform that will undoubtedly contribute to an enhanced and personalised learning experience for all MBA students.

The panel thinks highly of the student-centred approach of MSM and its MBA programme: student guidance, support and services at both school and university level make MBA students feel welcome and at home in Maastricht.

According to the panel, the MBA programme has clear and very effective admission requirements, which reflect the profile of the programme and lead to the enrolment of diverse student cohorts, in line with the targets and expectations of the programme. Moreover, almost all students manage to complete the different programme variants successfully and this mostly within the nominal duration of the programme.

The teaching staff involved in the MBA programme has adequate research credentials, disciplinary know-how, and didactic skills. The panel noticed that staff are also enthusiastic and committed to the programme and the MBA students. Moreover, the panel commends the attention of MSM and SBE to staff professionalisation, which in turn contributes to an academic environment in which education is valued. The panel also appreciates that SBE/MSM staff take adjunct faculty/external lecturers 'under their

wings' to ensure that courses are delivered in the best possible quality traditions of the school(s) and the university.

In sum, the panel thinks highly of the alignment between the different components of the programme and its variants, which all seem to fit like bits of a jigsaw puzzle that fall into place. Staff, facilities, services, admission requirements, success rate, teaching approaches, curriculum structure, ... all elements fit well within the bigger picture / profile of the programme.

All (teaching) staff are well aware of the audience they cater for and have a coherent understanding of the programme profile. According to the panel, this is an accomplishment for which the school, the management and the staff should be commended.

Taking these considerations into account, the panel assesses that the programme **meets** this standard.

Student assessment

Standard 3: The programme has an adequate system of student assessment in place.

Findings

Assessment system

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that the MBA programme operates an assessment system that is grounded in the UM's assessment framework and informed by the principles of constructive alignment, transparency, and quality assurance.

Assessment at MSM is governed by the Education and Examination Regulations (EER), which are updated annually and include provisions on assessment formats, resits, fraud prevention, grading scales and student rights. The EER ensures that assessment is fair, consistent and in accordance with national legislation.

Examiners are appointed by the Board of Examiners and meet the formal requirements set by UM. This principle is upheld for all courses in all MBA variants. All examiners use standardised templates for rubrics, grading forms and feedback. For each course, an assessment plan is submitted in advance and reviewed by the programme coordinator and Board of Examiners. This plan specifies the assessment components, weightings, criteria, and procedures for marking and moderation.

The panel was informed that the assessment system was strengthened following the integration of MSM in the university and SBE. While MSM has maintained some of its own procedures, alignment with SBE policy has improved standardisation and comparability. The Assurance of Assessment (AoA) cycle further supports the systematic monitoring of assessment quality at course level.

The panel noticed that there is a strong connection between the intended learning outcomes of the MBA programme, the course learning goals and the assessment structure. Each course consists of five learning goals, which are connected on a one-on-one basis to the five learning outcomes, which in turn are linked to the five Dublin Descriptors. The panel established that this connection is made visible and concrete in the MBA curriculum map. Further to its findings and considerations on standard 1, the panel is confident that the assessment structure will be adjusted to the envisaged learning outcomes and course learning goals that will become operational as of September 2025.

All assignments, both individual and group work, are assessed by means of detailed assessment rubrics. These rubrics ensure that each criterion is directly linked to one of the ILOs. This also applies to exams for which model answers are crafted and linked to the relevant learning outcomes. The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that such systematic approach to constructive alignment ensures a consistent evaluation process and allows to accurately track and measure student progress over time. It also allows educators to pinpoint specific areas where students excel or need improvement in relation to the respective learning outcomes.

The use of assessment rubrics exists already for a long time. However, the previous panel noticed that not all rubrics were implemented in a consistent way. Hence, the rubrics are now revised and discussed regularly among staff. Moreover, the academic course coordinators

hold meetings with the staff teaching in their course on both content and assessment. They systematically check the assessment grades before they are released to students. The current panel gathered from the discussions that good progress has been made in so far as grading consistency is concerned.

Overall, the panel found that the assessment system is well structured and based on university-wide policies and principles. The evaluation criteria are applied across the programme to promote alignment and fairness in assessments. Moreover, there are clear expectations and standards to help students identify their strengths and areas for improvement.

Course assessment

Each component of the MBA curriculum has a corresponding assessment strategy. The modular structure of the programme allows for focused and varied assessment within each course, whereby assessment usually takes place at the end of the module. Across the curriculum, students are assessed through a mix of individual and group assignments, written exams, essays, presentations, practical reports, and the master thesis. In general, every course combines individual and group-based tasks, written and oral components, and formative and summative assessments. For each MBA course, at least 70% of the final grade is based on individual assessment, mostly written assignments, reflective journals and in some cases written exams. The remaining percentage is used for group work including case study assignments and presentations. To ensure fairness, group assessments include peer evaluation components. Students are asked to assess their own and their peers' contributions, and these evaluations are used to adjust individual grades where necessary. This approach encourages accountability and supports the development of teamworking skills.

In line with university policy, assessment criteria are defined in advance, shared with students, and used consistently across evaluators. The course syllabi provide students with a clear description and information about the different assessment components within a course. The assessment criteria and rubrics are also included in the course syllabus and explained in class. After their assessment, students receive timely feedback, typically within three weeks after submission or examination. On completing a course, students evaluate both the education and the assessment provisions, which are then reviewed annually and may lead to course/exam adjustment.

Overall, the panel found course assessment to be valid, reliable and transparent. The evaluation process is both consistent across the curriculum components and systematically documented in course syllabi to students. Students indicated to the panel that the assessment provisions in the MBA programme are indeed transparent and communicated well in advance.

Assessment of graduation works

The master thesis constitutes the culmination of the MBA programme. MBA students can choose to pursue an academic research paper, a business consultancy project or a business plan. Thesis assessment is conducted by the supervisor and a second reader, who independently complete an identical assessment form.

As part of its external assessment, the panel reviewed a representative sample of 15 MBA master theses, as well as the corresponding completed evaluation forms. The selected theses were submitted in the academic year 2023-2024. The quality of the MBA theses will be addressed under the next standard. In so far as thesis assessment is concerned, the panel noticed that the evaluation form is detailed and

well structured. The form contains a total of 22 criteria, which are aligned with the learning goals of the course and are clustered around the five programme learning outcomes / Dublin descriptors. Each criterion gets an appreciation – ranging from very poor to excellent – while both assessors are expected to provide additional comments on each of the five criteria clusters. The criteria rubrics are elaborate and account for the respective type of projects. The thesis defence (oral presentation) is part of the assessment. The excel format of the evaluation form allows for an automatic calculation of the sub-scores, the overall score and the common final grade. This calculation is based on the weight of each learning outcome/Dublin descriptor; the final grade is the average of the two assessors' scores.

In so far as the completed assessment forms are concerned, the panel noticed that in general assessors provide additional comments that are - in a majority of cases but not always - relevant and insightful. In several cases, however, the panel found that the insightful feedback in the comment boxes was more critical than the score for that descriptor. Tending to agree with the criticism, the panel found several theses to be rather generously scored.

The panel understands that the thesis assessment is set-up in line with provisions that are common to all courses. Nonetheless, the panel wondered why the master thesis should also assess the learning skills of the student, i.e. the learning outcome connected to the Dublin Descriptor 5, and this for 10% of the total score. Moreover, the thesis assessment criteria for DD5 (which focus on the quality and amount of literature used) and the learning goal of the thesis course (identify relevant literature and data sources) do not seem to pertain to the programme learning outcome (work autonomously

and determine own learning needs) they are supposed to reflect. Furthermore, the panel found the assessment form very detailed (22 criteria and five comment boxes) and thus rather cumbersome to complete giving individual appreciations and written motivations. The discussion with the representatives of the Board of Examiners and the Assessment Committee showed that they are aware of these issues. The set-up of the learning outcomes and course learning goals will change as of September 2025, while the programme is considering an adjustment of the thesis assessment form. Panel, programme team and quality assurance bodies agreed that an 'ideal' evaluation form would consist of fewer criteria that are complemented systematically with insightful feedback. Such form would do justice to the efforts of the students without increasing the workload of the assessors.

Quality assurance

The panel gathered from the written materials and the discussions on site that the quality of assessment is safeguarded by the Board of Examiners (BoE). Since the integration of MSM in the university and in SBE, a Chamber within the SBE Board of Examiners has been established to safeguard the quality of all post-initial programmes offered by SBE, including the MBA programme (variants) under review. This Executive Education chamber consists of four experienced faculty members, one of whom is affiliated externally, and a senior secretary who coordinates the activities and advises the board. The Chamber collaborates closely with the Board of Examiners of SBE, discussing and agreeing on policies and guidelines.

The panel noticed that the Chamber fulfils all regular tasks of a Board of Examiners, and does so with expertise, commitment and the necessary independence. The Chamber among others

appoints examiners and provides them with guidance on their responsibilities, prevents and detects fraud and plagiarism, and verifies whether students achieve the programme learning outcomes. The panel was informed that given the global composition of the MBA student body, the Chamber handles relatively more plagiarism cases (than the SBE Board of Examiners) as the concept of plagiarism is understood differently in several parts of the world. In all instances, however, the Chamber applies and maintains the same 'Dutch' interpretation as any other Board of Examiners does for all other students at Maastricht University. Similarly, while MBA students are informed about the grading culture and the cum-laude requirements in the Netherlands / at UM, the Chamber is called upon relatively often to handle course results and cum-laude requests from students who were used to a different grading system.

One of the key instruments for quality assurance is the annual assessment review. Course coordinators are required to submit an assessment file that includes the exam or assignment, answer models, grading criteria, a sample of marked work, and an evaluation report. The BoE reviews these files to verify consistency and fairness and provides feedback to instructors.

The Board of Examiners also plays a role in training and supporting teaching staff. New examiners are briefed on procedures and expectations. Regular workshops are held on assessment design, feedback, and fraud prevention. In cases of student complaints or grade appeals, the BoE acts as the decision-making body and ensures that procedures are followed correctly.

The Chamber collaborates closely with the SBE Assessment Committee to ensure that a robust quality assurance process is in place through the Assurance of Assessment cycle. The panel

gathered from the discussions that the SBE-wide Assessment Committee plays an important role as auditor and as the body of expertise that has a helicopter view of all SBE programmes, including the MSM programmes. In addition, each programme goes through an internal quality assurance process (Assurance of Learning, AoL) every three years that is organised by the Policy Development and Quality Assurance Office and the SBE Learning Academy. This process also includes a review of course and thesis assessment samples.

The panel gathered from the discussion with representatives of the Chamber and the Assessment Committee that the quality assessment in the MBA programme is safeguarded in a meticulous and knowledgeable way. The BoE reports annually to the Faculty Board and participates in institutional quality assurance cycles. Its independent role and clear mandate provide a solid basis for the integrity of the assessment process.

In addition to the Board of Examiners/Assessment Committee, the academic course coordinator / appointed course examiner plays an important role in safeguarding the quality of the course and its assessment. In order to ensure quality across the different courses, MSM appoints an Academic Course Coordinator as responsible for the design, delivery, assessment and improvement of each course. These coordinators consult with teaching staff, monitor assessment outcomes, and hold final responsibility for grade validation. Moreover, for each course, an SBE examiner is responsible to safeguard that students meet the programme requirements and that for instance cases of academic misconduct are reported to the Chamber / Board of Examiners. According to the panel, this approach works well and instils confidence in the assessment system. It also demonstrates

that the programme took the recommendation of the previous accreditation report seriously.

Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that the MBA programme can rely on a robust system of assessment. This appreciation is based first and foremost on the fact that both course and thesis assessments are embedded in well-established policies and frameworks at the level of the school(s) and the university. The curriculum map and the assessment files, moreover, demonstrate that course learning goals are assessed adequately, which in turn ensures that the different learning outcomes at programme level are covered.

Furthermore, the panel establishes that course assessment is carefully designed, varied, and well aligned with the learning objectives. In addition, the transparent information on assessment ensures that students are adequately and fairly assessed throughout the curriculum.

The panel thinks highly of the quality assurance system for assessment, which is comprehensive and effective. The different players have their own roles, which are well defined and complementary. Together, they ensure that assessment practices are regularly reviewed, aligned with institutional policy, and continuously improved

based on feedback and reflection. In this regard, the panel commends the Executive Education Chamber of the Board of Examiners and the SBE Assessment Committee for their expertise and commitment. The panel is convinced that the assessment quality of the MBA programme is in competent hands with the Chamber and the Committee.

The panel's review of the MBA theses demonstrated that in terms of assessment, the evaluation form is relevant but elaborate and thus cumbersome for assessors to complete in an ideal way. The panel understood that there are plans to adjust the assessment form, an intention it fully supports. In this review process, the programme may want to consider if the learning skills descriptor/learning outcome (DD5) should remain part of the form. Moreover, the panel advises the programme to monitor the completed thesis evaluation forms as some theses received rather critical (and in the eyes of the panel, appropriate) feedback comments but were scored rather generously. Notwithstanding these points for attention, the panel is satisfied that the overall thesis assessment process is executed in a sound and professional way.

Taking these considerations into account, the panel assesses that the programme **meets** this standard.

Achieved learning outcomes

Standard 4: The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

Findings

There are two ways to establish whether the intended learning outcomes have been achieved: by reviewing the quality of the graduation projects and by looking at the professional whereabouts of the alumni after their graduation. The panel has looked at both elements when assessing the quality of the programme.

Quality of graduation projects

The Master of Business Administration concludes with a final thesis (16 EC), an individual academic research project that serves as the capstone of the programme and takes the form of an academic research paper, a business consultancy project, or a business plan. The choice between three thesis types gives students the option to explore real business problems that can help them develop their business careers. While the focus of the three thesis types differs, their respective validity is ensured by the requirement that all thesis types identify and process academic literature, use or develop a conceptual framework, collect quantitative and/or qualitative data, and provide an analysis and recommendations.

As part of its external review, the panel studied a representative sample of 15 master theses, which were submitted and successfully completed in the academic year 2023-2024. The sample was representative for the final thesis scores, the three thesis types and the six MBA variants featuring graduates in that period. The panel found that thirteen theses fulfilled the minimum quality requirements of a final MBA product, while one thesis was judged by the

panel as insufficient quality and another one as only marginally sufficient.

In many other cases, though, the thesis quality was good and the topics societally relevant. Across the sample, the thesis projects were elaborate, contained a lot of data and covered the full empirical cycle. Several students adopted quantitative methodologies, for which they used adequate statistical methods in an exemplary way.

As points for attention the panel noted that many students who chose to do research for a business consultancy project or a business plan struggled to combine the academic requirements common to all MBA theses (literature review, conceptual framework, data collection and analysis, recommendations) with the essentially practical approach of these two types. In its discussion with the programme team, the panel suggested to re-explore the added value of offering all three thesis project options; alternatively, the programme may want to develop a more specific or alternative format (including fitting academic requirements) for these two thesis types. Moreover, the panel found that in theses with a lower pass score, the focus was sometimes missing, that the research (question) was too broad and the ensuing research too lengthy, which in turn made the product difficult to digest and assess. The overall picture which emerges is one where MBA students enter the programme with very different backgrounds, also in terms of academic research skills. Students with an understanding of quantitative research methods tend to look for a thesis topic in which they can adopt and demonstrate successfully their familiarity with these methods.

Some of the students with a more limited background in academic research skills, however, do not seem to fully catch up with their deficiencies, notwithstanding the research methods course and the thesis supervision. With such a variety of backgrounds, according to the panel, having the choice between three thesis types becomes a challenge rather than an opportunity.

The current panel noticed that the former accreditation report showed some concern regarding the consistency in the academic rigour of the theses. To counter this concern, the MBA programme organised more workshops to assist students in their research, as well as regular discussions among teaching staff and thesis supervisors to develop a common perspective on the thesis. The panel thinks that these efforts have led to an improvement of the thesis quality. Nonetheless, there is definitely room for further enhancement. Hence, the panel suggests the programme to look into the preparation phase of the thesis and to monitor whether students' competencies are sufficiently developed and aligned for the chosen thesis type, topic and research approach. Moreover, the programme may want to organise thesis supervision training to ensure that supervisors can provide tailored support to the individual MBA students. Given the outcome of its thesis review, the panel wonders whether the programme should continue to offer all three thesis type options in their current set-up. An alternative plan might be to reconsider how the consultancy project and the business plan can find a proper balance between relevance and rigour.

Notwithstanding these points of attention and recommendations, the panel found that MBA students demonstrate through their thesis that they achieve all intended learning outcomes.

Performance of graduates

The MBA programme prepares student-professionals for a boost in their career. Full-time MBA students temporarily leave the job market for their study, while part-time MBA students combine study and work.

The panel gathered from the written materials that MSM tracks alumni outcomes through graduate surveys, LinkedIn analysis and informal feedback from alumni and employers. Data on recent cohorts show that between half and two-thirds of the MBA graduates make considerable job promotion shortly after graduating the programme, and that almost all graduates obtain a salary increase. Across variants, MBA graduates (continue to) work across the globe and do so in different sectors (such as consulting, technology, finance and accounting) and roles. Employers include multinational corporations, international NGOs, SMEs, and public-sector organisations. The panel acknowledges that such variety of career paths align with the profile and scope of the programme and its international and intercultural dimension.

The alumni the panel spoke to during the site visit confirmed what colleagues had reported in the student chapter, i.e. that the MBA programme helped them to develop transferable skills such as communication, intercultural collaboration, analytical thinking and problem-solving. The international classroom, the applied projects and the thesis all contributed to building confidence and competencies that are valued in the labour market. Although the panel spoke to only few alumni, their individual testimonies were strong. Some of the programme variants 'on location' seem to attract a good number of women, who use the MBA programme to bolster their full professional potential in regions and cultures where this is not always taken for granted.

In sum, the panel welcomes the attentive follow-up of MBA graduates. The programme collects quantitative data, such as average grades and alumni career trajectories, which offer a starting point for assessing outcomes. Alumni data also illustrate the level of programme impact on career progression and post-education positions. Moreover, the attempt to monitor alumni positions demonstrates an interest by MSM in understanding the long-term value of the MBA programme. The inclusion of performance metrics indicates that efforts are made to measure student success after graduation.

The data gathered show that MBA graduates (continue to) function in different environments and make career moves in a broad range of positions and sectors. The panel established that the MBA programme at MSM can have a real transformational impact on the lives and careers of its graduates. The panel is therefore convinced that students who graduate the MBA programme (variants) possess all end level qualifications.

Considerations

Based on the above-mentioned findings, the panel considers that students who graduate from the MBA programme have effectively acquired all intended learning outcomes. According to the panel, the selected and reviewed MBA theses meet the quality expectations for a final MBA project.

Moreover, MSM goes at lengths to monitor the professional whereabouts of its graduates. These data, as well as the testimonies from alumni show convincingly that the MBA programme has a transformational power, preparing students for a more challenging and more rewarding and fulfilling position on the labour market upon graduation. Alumni praise the study period in Maastricht and/or the other locations for developing their transferable skills which are highly in demand on the labour market.

In addition to these positive considerations, the panel sees room for enhancing the preparation phase of the master thesis. In fact, MBA students could be monitored whether their competencies are sufficiently developed and aligned for the chosen thesis type, topic and research approach. Given the highly diverse backgrounds of MBA students, thesis supervisors could be trained to provide tailored research / methodological support to facilitate the thesis process of their respective students. As the business consultancy projects and the business plans in the thesis review seemed to struggle to balance practical projects with the requirements for an academic research paper, the panel wonders whether the programme should continue to offer all three thesis type possibilities in their current set-up and form.

Taking these considerations into account, the panel assesses that the programme **meets** this standard.

Attachment 1: assessment panel

Eric Dooms, chair

Chair, Associate Professor of Strategy at TIAS; experienced in international programmes and accreditation procedures.

Hans van Ees

Emeritus professor at University of Groningen; expert in corporate governance with extensive academic and advisory experience.

Jochen Bergs

Assistant professor at Hasselt University; expert in patient safety, healthcare innovation and educational assessment.

Faye Bellis, student-member

Student of BSc International Business Administration at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam since 2022.

The panel was supported by Mark Delmartino, certified secretary.

All panel members and the secretary have completed and signed a statement of independence and impartiality, and these have been submitted to NVAO.

Attachment 2: site visit programme

Location: Tapijnkazerne 11, Maastricht

Tuesday 28 January 2025

- 09.00 Arrival, welcome and internal panel meeting
- 10.00 Session with Programme Management and MSM Education Board
- 10.45 Session with MSM Partner Representatives
- 11.30 Session with MM and MBA students
- 12.00 Session with MM and MBA alumni
- 12.30 Session with Board of Examiners & Assessment Committee
- 13.00 Lunch and Internal panel session
- 14.00 Session with MSM Teaching staff
- 15.00 Internal panel session
- 15.15 Concluding session Programme Management
- 15.45 Internal panel session
- 16.45 Plenary Feedback
- 17.15 Development Dialogue
- 18.00 End of site visit

Attachment 3: Recommendations from previous assessment

The previous committee requested the **learning goals** of the MM be written more precisely. Following the integration into Maastricht University, the MM programme (and MBA) are undergoing programme alignment, bringing the learning goals in line with those of SBE. Additionally, during the Assurance of Learning process the audit panel has reviewed the learning goals of both the MBA and MM programme. The findings are expected end of September 2024 and will be incorporated in the programme alignment. This process will be completed by September 2025.

The previous panel mentioned that the **MBA curriculum**, which is designed to provide students both with an academic and professional learning experience, potentially leaves students underprepared for the thesis. In order to improve support to the students, a series of workshops have been organised for them (see section 4.5.5). The workshops are available for all students, not only those located in Maastricht. Furthermore, the panel suggested developing the MBA specialisations offered in the programme. Since the last accreditation, the MBA programme has already expanded the number of expertise tracks (electives of 12 ECTS credits) that it offers. However, we are also looking to develop further specialisations of 18 ECTS credits, building on the current expertise tracks. Areas of interest for development are Healthcare, Digital Innovation and Sustainable Food Systems.

As for the **MM programme**, the panel emphasized continuous improvement of the Marketing Management curriculum in terms of academic content. The current development of the Flex learning environment has been a further opportunity to ensure an improvement in the course's curriculum.

This leads to the panel's recommendation to make greater use of **digital platforms** for both the MBA and MM programmes. This has been implemented in Canvas, where all course information, assignments, support activities and self-assessments have been added to provide further support to the students' learning. The learning environment, which we refer to as Flex, centralise all course information in one place, regardless of whether students are studying online or face-to-face, to ensure consistency in learning as well as a more personalised approach. The Flex learning environment is currently available for all MBA programme variants and is now being created for the MM programme. The MM programme will move to Flex in September 2025.

The panel requested that we consider ways to improve **educational expertise in the development of the programme and staff**. Following the move to the UM, MSM has made great use of the training opportunities available within SBE. All teaching staff have been engaged in obtaining the UTQ. As mentioned above, the UM provides a range of educational workshops that are available to MSM faculty members. Moreover, we work closely with SBE's Learning Academy, particularly regarding the development and implementation of thesis supervisor trainings (for more information see section 4.6).

The former panel was satisfied with the use of rubrics in all course assessments but was concerned with that for some of the assignments reviewed the **application of the rubrics was inconsistent**. In order to deal with these inconsistencies, the rubrics are regularly revised and discussed amongst faculty. Moreover, in order to avoid inconsistencies in application, academic course coordinators (ACC's) discuss

courses and assessments with all faculty members teaching in their courses. Finally, the ACC's check the assessment grades before they are released to students. It should be noted that the ACC has the final decision on grades.

The former panel showed some concern regarding the consistency in the **academic rigour of the thesis**. As already mentioned, more workshops have been organised to assist students in their research journey. Furthermore, regular discussions with faculty members on the thesis help to develop a common perspective on the thesis. More specifically, a new evaluation form has been developed to provide more feedback in the rubric and examiners are now required to provide written feedback on the forms. Finally, regarding the business plan, a working group has been set up to review the assessment criteria in the rubric.

Attachment 4: reviewed documents

Self-evaluation report

Master of Business Administration and Master of Arts in Management. NVAO Self-evaluation report, Maastricht University - School of Business and Economics - Maastricht School of Management, November 2024.

Maastricht University put at disposition of the panel an extensive 'base room' with materials pertaining to the two degree programmes under review. Apart from the self-evaluation report, the panel looked at following (sets of) documents:

- SBE Strategy
- Curriculum Map & Description
- Course Syllabi
- Programme SWOT analysis
- Follow-up previous accreditation
- SBE Matrix structure
- List of MSM Partner Institutions
- Name Change MM
- Programme set-up MSM MBA & MSM MM
- Composition of teaching staff and CV's
- Academic course coordinators
- University Teaching Qualification
- International Classroom
- Class of 2024 Yearbook video
- UM Vision on Assessment / SBE Assessment Policy
- Education and Examination Regulations 2023-2024 and 2024-2025
- SBE Board of Examiners chamber structure 2025
- Annual report Board of Examiners – Executive Education 2021-2022, 2022-2023, 2023-2024
- Assurance of Learning
- Teaching and Grading Guidelines
- Thesis Guide MBA/MM and Thesis Evaluation Form
- Completion Rates & Cum Laude Rates
- Success rates per course MM and MBA programme

After the visit, and upon explicit request of the panel, the programmes provided additional information:

- MM and MBA learning goals
- Learning goals Expertise tracks / Specialisations MBA

Thesis review

A representative sample of 15 theses and their assessment forms, selected among students graduating the Master of Business Administration in 2023-2024. Names and student numbers are available with evaluation agency AeQui.

Attachment 5: overview of MBA variants

Set-up MBA programme – variants and partners



